

AN IMPERIAL WORLD AT WAR: THE BRITISH EMPIRE, 1939-1945

KELLOGG COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, 21ST-22ND SEPTEMBER 2013

Conference Abstracts

Panel 1: Colonial Anxieties

Benjamin Zachariah

Paper title: Nazi-Hunting in India on the Eve of the Second World War

Abstract: Throughout the interwar period, British Indian administration was geared towards a war against communists and 'terrorists'. In 1938, when the state administration finally awoke to the danger of National Socialist organisations in India, and to their Indian representatives, they could rely in the first instance mainly on the very organisations they had regarded as enemies for so long. There began, therefore, a curious arms-length collaboration between communist and socialist publications and the police and intelligence organisations that had persecuted them for so long. Only it was not clear to what extent the collaboration was acknowledged: surveillance methods aimed at controlling leftist networks were now employed in tapping into the leftist networks' own intelligence, while not a few of these leftist networks' publications dropped broad hints to government agencies as to who the Nazis in India were. Yet it was not too long ago that major members of the British Indian administration were openly pro-Nazi.

Felicia Yap, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge

Paper title: The Significance and Impact of Japanese Propaganda in Occupied British Asia

Abstract: This paper examines the significance and impact of Japanese propaganda efforts in occupied Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and Shanghai, especially in relation to the British in these wartime territories. It examines how the Japanese attempted to solicit the assistance of Allied civilians and subjects in their attempts at broadcasting wartime propaganda, as well as the motivations of some individuals who elected to assist Japanese efforts in this regard. The paper also explores the ways in which the overt use of propaganda by the Japanese had a considerable impact on British imperial thinking during the period. Indeed, some British civilian administrators who were interned by the Japanese became increasingly aware of the efficacy and potential of Japanese propaganda methods as the war progressed. The British even appear to have incorporated some of the techniques favoured by the Japanese into their own methods of post-war governance, such as through the staging of governmental press conferences and the establishment of public relations outfits after the war. In Hong Kong, for instance, one of the first actions of the post-war interim British government was to organise daily press conferences for the heads of various governmental departments to discuss their administrative work with the public (a step which essentially constituted an unusual departure from pre-war governmental norms). A public relations department was also instituted by the British colonial government in Malaya during the months after the war. In examining these issues, this paper seeks to shed new light on the effects as well as the broader significance of Japanese propaganda efforts in British Asia both during and after the Second World War.

Oliver Coates, University of Cambridge

Paper Title: Contested Commemoration in Late-Colonial Nigeria

Abstract: War commemoration has rarely been examined in studies of the late-colonial period in Anglophone West Africa. Focusing on southwestern Nigeria, this paper will show how the colonial government struggled to create an official commemorative culture. It will contrast this with the ways in which ex-servicemen continued to evoke the war. Drawing on debates around conflict and memory in recent cultural theory, the paper will suggest that the inadequacy of official commemorative culture provides a revealing insight into deeper political and social tensions within the late-colonial state.

Panel 2: Mobilizing the Empire

Doug Delaney, Royal Military College of Canada

Paper title: Mixable and Matchable Army Formations: Explaining Anglo-Canadian Interoperability during the Second World War

Abstract: British and Canadian army formations of the Second World War were virtually interchangeable. First Canadian Army fought under Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group for the entire campaign in Northwest Europe, most of it with one of two British corps under Canadian command. British armies in Italy and France, at one time or other, had a Canadian corps as part of their fighting establishment. And scores of Canadian and British division commanders plugged themselves into other British Commonwealth corps when the tactical situation suited it. Such inter-army arrangements were relatively simple because the British and Canadian armies were organized in nearly identical ways, and the commanders and staffs in both armies spoke the language of the staff colleges at Camberley and Quetta – no small advantage when coordinating operations involving hundreds of thousands of troops. That level of interoperability did not come about by accident. It was the result of decades of common staff training, officer exchanges, and Commonwealth coordination, much of it dating back to decisions taken at the Imperial Conferences of 1907 and 1909. This paper examines how the British and Canadian armies developed such interchangeable formations.

Nick Hewitt, National Museum of the Royal Navy

Paper title: A Shared Tradition: The Commonwealth Navies, 1939-1945

Abstract: A popular misconception says that after France surrendered to Nazi Germany in June 1940 Great Britain 'stood alone'. In fact Great Britain enjoyed the support of the British Empire and Commonwealth, which covered a quarter of the earth's surface. When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, India and the colonies were committed as well, and soon afterwards, the self-governing Dominions declared war independently. The people of the Empire and Commonwealth contributed to the war effort on land, sea and air, and to the home front. Without the economic resources of the Empire, it is arguable whether Great Britain could have survived at all.

This paper will focus on the contribution made by the Empire and Commonwealth to the successful prosecution of the war at sea. Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa all had their own independent naval services either before or soon after the

outbreak of the Second World War, and each fought their own unique war – Canada, for example, eventually took the lion's share of responsibility for the Battle of the Atlantic, and by 1945 the Royal Canadian Navy was the third largest navy in the world. On the other side of the globe, the Royal Indian Navy fought a bitter, unheralded littoral war against the Japanese along the Burmese coast. Although these services drew on the British Royal Navy for their traditions, institutional culture, uniforms and ships, they had their own distinct identities, which the war helped to define and develop.

Men and women from many other countries (including volunteers from neutral Ireland) served with the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy. They included thousands of Indian and African sailors, categorised together as 'Lascars' by the sometimes less-than-sensitive authorities. The Lascars' war is truly a 'hidden history'; many people are aware that when the German submarine *U48* sank the liner *City of Benares*, 77 children went down with her, but how many remember the 160 Lascar seamen who also drowned?

The Imperial war effort cannot be understood without understanding the importance of the war at sea. In turn, unless we make an effort to understand the contribution made by Imperial and Commonwealth seafarers, we can only ever hear part of the story.

Vipul Dutta, King's College London

Paper title: The Army and the Academy: The 'Making and Unmaking' of Military Training Academies in India and South Asia, 1932-1955

Abstract: The Indian Military Academy (formally inaugurated in 1932) and its precursors in the form of preparatory schools and colleges were the first Indian institutional expressions of formalized training for Indians who wanted to be 'officers' and gives an interesting ringside view of the history of this period. In the 1930s when the IMA was being set up, it was largely seen as a response to placate the nationalist sentiment in India. Only nine years later was its importance felt acutely by the British when men and material were exported from India to Europe in the wake of the Second World War. The courses were shortened to increase recruitment and an unprecedented expansion of the institution took place. This was an interesting spectacle, coming as it did two decades after the First World War, where leave aside an Academy, even Commissions were hard to come by for Indians. The establishment of training institutions were responsible for catalyzing complex institutional, morphological and compositional changes in the Indian Army. Changes in recruitment patterns brought not only caste in the forefront, but disparate groups like Anglo-Indians too negotiated for a place (and 'respectability') in the academies but with varying degrees of success.

The establishment of the IMA spurred the development of other military institutions in India both on the scale of higher training as well as feeder institutions (such as the King George's Royal Military Schools). With the inauguration of the IMA and the dismal performance of its initial intake, attempts were made to revive precisely those feeder institutions which a decade ago had been shut due to fiscal stringency and when the government learnt that the 'martial race theory' was faltering. Moreover, demands for replacing 'costlier British instructors with Indians' were accompanied with demands to have more Indians admitted to the Staff College at Quetta and given staff appointments. A self-functioning military academy which on principle was set up for Indians demanded a corps of staff officers and other functionaries which could only be had with an efficient Staff College. Evidently, it was the reconstitution of the Inter-Services Academy at IMA (later separated into the National Defence Academy) which itself provided the first step in the reconstitution of the Staff College into a joint inter-services training college.

Institutional histories of military academies are sometimes seen in the light of larger political developments in a country (which marginalize the micro-history of the institution itself), and at times never looked at all. Through this paper and my larger doctoral project, I attempt to argue that military institutions in India were as much a product of the experiences of the Second World War and nationalist campaigns for greater 'Indianization' as they were agents of military professionalism, modernization and institutionalization of some key aspects of Armed forces training in the subcontinent. The changed institutional landscape of the Indian military gave rise to newer changes in training and recruitment, not all of them being accepted with enthusiasm by precisely those sections of the populace (Princely rulers, legislators etc.) which had campaigned for them vociferously in the preceding decades. A history of military institutions in colonial India (and Pakistan, Burma and parts of Anglophone Africa) is as much a story of the demands of nationalization as it is about war time politics- both domestic and international.

Panel 3: Militarizing the Empire

Susan R. Grayzel, University of Mississippi

Paper title: Protecting Which States and Bodies?: Developing Civil Defense in an Imperial Context

Abstract: In February 1942, Tej Bahadur Sapru (prominent member of the Liberal Party in India) wrote to Sir Maurice Hallett (then governor of the UP) about a recent demonstration of Air Raids Precautions measures that he had witnessed in Allahabad:

It is true that if our slogan is to be 'sit quietly in your houses in the safest room' it will fit in with the life of Purdah Nashin Ladies, but you cannot exclude the possibility of unfortunate mishaps in crowded parts of the town full of Purdah Nashin ladies and it is as against those dangers that many of us feel some anxiety. I think educated Indian ladies will be quite willing to help their sisters in this matter by going round but this has got to be organized.¹

The "unfortunate mishaps," of course, were air raids and the potential bombing of civilian spaces and bodies under the protection of the British empire.

As was the case with metropolitan Britain, preparing the entire civilian populace to withstand attacks on their homes, property, livelihoods and lives required the invention of civil defense prior to the outbreak of war in 1939 and the incorporation of the entire population into the waging—and thus winning—of modern, total war.

As the quotation above vividly illustrates, the limits of populations and spaces presumed to be in need of such protection and engagement with the war effort did not stop at the shores of the United Kingdom, although the imperial context of civil defense is largely invisible in the historiography. The aerial bombardment of British India, and the distribution of measures and material designed to enable civilian populations to endure such bombing across the empire remain curiously understudied aspects of the history of

¹ India Office (BL) MSS Eur/E251/63

both the Second World War and the British Empire.²

Building on previous research, which has focused on the development and implementation of civil defense particularly Air Raids Precautions (ARP) from the First World War through the Second World War, I am proposing in this paper to begin an exploration of the imperial dimensions of Air Raids Precautions and civil defence.

This paper will largely focus on how those planning and then implementing civil defence measures debated their scope and limits, from figuring out how “educated Indian ladies” could inform their “sisters” about how to best defend themselves to determining the distribution of gas masks throughout the empire. Using government sources as well as accounts in newspapers and other media, the paper will also explore reactions to state-imposed measures as, unsurprisingly, responses on the ground reflected varying attitudes towards such policies.

Overall, the development of civil defense was as much a cultural project as a strategic one and it relied on assumptions about gender, ethnicity, race, and class. The paper will argue that, at its core, the invention of imperial civil defense reflected government attitudes about which states and also which bodies were most in need of—and worth—protecting and the views of imperial subjects about their willingness to cooperate with measures that amounted to an expansion of the colonial state.

Ali Raza & Franziska Roy

Paper title: In the Name of Self Defense: The Second World and the Politics of Paramilitary Groups in British India ca. 1939-46

Abstract: This paper will examine certain aspects of the social and political transformations wrought by the Second World War in British India. In particular, we will focus on the proliferation of volunteer/paramilitary/civil defense groups which emerged from virtually all sections of the political spectrum. While many of these groups could trace their antecedents back to the 1920s and 1930s, their activities and politics were fundamentally transformed owing to the onset of the War and its attendant effects. In particular, we seek to examine the Muslim League National Guards, the RSS and the Akali Dal/Fauj. By focusing on the Punjab and the United Provinces, we will attempt to show how these groups mobilized and organized their military activities in opposition to the real and perceived activities of the opposing community/group. Together, these groups played a crucial role in worsening an already tense communal atmosphere. They also played a leading role in precipitating and organizing the communal holocaust of 1947. While the organized nature of Partition massacres and the role of paramilitary organizations in orchestrating them has been touched upon by historians, there has been no commentary on the longer-term effects of large-scale and continuous mobilization for civil defense during the Second World War in the context of the sometimes meticulous and strategic nature of partition violence a few years later. This paper will examine some of the continuities in terms of organized mobilization during and after the war and how this bled into the communal disturbances witnessed from 1946 on. In doing so, it will seek to contribute to the historiography on the Second World War and its impact on British India, in addition to adding to the relatively recent shift within Partition historiography which looks at the organized nature of Partition

² There is no mention of the implementation of civil defence in the empire in T.H. O'Brien's landmark official history *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955); nor is the issue addressed in studies such as Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire in the Second World War* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

violence.

Narender Yadav, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Paper title: The Second World War and the Indian Armed Forces: Perceptions of the Persons who joined the Defence Forces

Abstract: At the outset of the Second World War in September 1939, India was declared to be participating in the War without taking into confidence Indian leaders and the people. The leading political parties like Indian National Congress opposed any type of assistance from India including manpower for the army. The political climate deteriorated with each passing day. Quit India Movement in August 1942 posed a severe threat of internal disturbances. The Indian police personnel deployed to curb the disturbances, were awarded with gallantry medals for shooting at Congress workers leading the movements. It was the time when Japanese had already overthrown the British rule from Malaya and Burma. They even threatened the north-east part of India. Still, Indian youth dashed to the recruitment offices to get enlisted in the Indian armed forces and consequently formed the largest voluntary force to fight the war for British cause. All the three services- Army, Navy and Air Force grew ten folds between 1939 and 1945. The Indians indeed joined the Indian armed forces for variety of reasons. Some joined to follow their family tradition, others needed job and still others took the British to their words and were influenced by their recruiting propaganda. However, force recruitment also cannot be denied. My research paper seeks to explore the reasons as why such a large numbers of Indians joined the Indian armed forces despite adverse political climate. During the course of research, I explored variety of sources like newspapers, assembly debates, Fauji Akhbars and biographies, etc. I also tried to explore it by interviewing the veterans of the Second World War. However, the records of the Second World War held at History Division (Defence Archives), Ministry of Defence, India were particularly helpful.

Panel 4: Realizing State Power

Andrew Muldoon, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Paper title: "India Is a Fine Country After All!": The Cultivation of Military Morale in British India

Abstract: This paper describes the various efforts made by both British and American military authorities to increase and maintain morale among service troops in India and the SEAC region generally during the Second World War. Drawing on institutional records, contemporary accounts by soldiers and oral histories of the conflict from both countries, it argues that both military establishments in South Asia struggled to provide psychological and material support to their troops.

The paper specifically addresses the challenges faced by the British Army in indoctrinating troops into a service region which had been enormously unpopular even before the war began. Moreover, in addition to dealing with soldiers' unhappiness with rations, amenities, climate and transport, just to name some of the areas of grievance, the Army also had to grapple with the problems of turning citizen-soldiers into a colonial force, one which might serve as a symbol of British prestige and as an instrument of political control. In contrast to the Americans, who could devote the bulk of their already superior resources to material welfare concerns, British commanders

and policy-makers felt the need to provide significant justification to their troops for the British presence in India, hardly an easy task given the military and administrative failures that marked the first half of the war in the region. Such justification was seen as vital not only for improving the attitude of the troops to service in India, but also to inculcating a sense of imperial identity which would allow the Army to fulfill its internal colonial responsibilities as well.

Regarding the significance of these events for the larger history of colonial encounters, the paper will at the end suggest that the study of the experiences of American and British forces in India complicates ideas about “colonial prestige,” especially its use as a synonym for “racial prestige.”

Annalisa Urbano, Universität Bayreuth

Paper title: Beyond the Allied Wartime Propaganda: British Labour Policies in Somalia during the Second World War

Abstract: During the Second World War, the Horn of Africa was the scene of the struggle between the armies of two colonial powers, Great Britain and Italy. As a result of the conflict, the Italians were defeated and a temporary British Military Administration (BMA) was established in the enemy's colonies Eritrea and Somalia (1941-50). The conventional account of the BMA highlights the Allied forces' triumph in the Horn of Africa 'liberating' and 'emancipating' local communities from fascist oppression. Influenced by the British wartime propaganda, this narrative produced limited views of Eritrean and Somali pasts downplaying the socioeconomic impacts of the military occupation.

Looking at the features of the policies adopted by the BMA in Somalia, the paper argues that the military administration resulted in a general impoverishment of the region and critically affected the local economy. A provisory administration, the BMA received little support from the *metropole* and based its sustenance on local resources. The paper discusses how this became increasingly controversial. With the aim to make the region self-supporting, the BMA restored structures of the Italian (fascist) colonial economy based on a forced labour system, and introduced new schemes of civilian labour conscription. Moreover, harnessing the local resources to the Allied war effort, these policies assumed a distinctly exploitative character: local infrastructures (economic services, industries, and facilities) were broken down to pieces, shipped and replaced within the borders of the British Empire. Finally, the paper discusses how the BMA attempts at 'pacifying' Somalia through the use of collective punishments exacerbated conflicts over local resources throughout the 1940s.

Euan McKay, University of Tokyo

Paper title: Waiting for Their Ship to Come: British Retention of Japanese Troops in South East Asia after WWII

Abstract: This paper describes Anglo-American negotiations over the repatriation of Japanese troops from South East Asia after the conclusion of the Second World War, focusing on repatriation shipping in particular. The British had denied Japanese troops the status of POW, terming them Japanese Surrendered Personnel (JSP) in line with UK and US policy in Europe. Initially, virtually all of the over 750,000 JSP in the command were used as labour in a variety of roles, and some were also retained as armed troops

under British command. In addition, while most returned home between April and October 1946 when shipping became available, the British kept over 100,000 back to use as what amounted to slave labour until the end of 1947. This case shows how the British had to balance recovering their empire in Asia with both the need to ensure access to US materiel and global public opinion. In addition, it draws attention to a very large group of prisoners who have until now been largely absent from western histories of the wartime and postwar period, and what was a very common experience during and after the war: the denial of POW status.

Panel 5: The Imperial Economy

Iain Johnston, Christ's College, University of Cambridge

Paper title: Gold and Dollars: The Dominions and British War Finance, 1939-1945

Abstract: Recent historiography of the Second World War has increasingly acknowledged the UK's dependence on its empire to first survive and then take the offensive against the Axis powers. If the imperial contribution is highlighted now more than ever before, however, there has still been limited attention paid to one group in particular: the British Commonwealth of Nations. The UK and its self-governing Dominions – Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – formed an imperial sub-group, a voluntary alliance within and yet curiously aloof from the empire. The status of the Dominions and their development from white settler-societies facilitated unique financial relations with the metropole which were utilised fully during the Second World War.

Most attention on the Commonwealth alliance in the Second World War has concentrated on battlefield performance and the problems of inter-imperial political relations as war exerted increasing pressure on the UK and the Dominions. Other aspects, such as the importance of Dominion aid in financing the British war effort, have received much less attention. Even where war finance is acknowledged, existing historiography has mainly focused narrowly on bilateral relationships.

Wartime financial relations between the Dominions and the UK went through a distinct transformation. Initially the UK's hegemonic responsibilities within the alliance extended to providing the capital necessary for both the development of Dominion industries and ensuring that finance was not a limiting factor in garnering the maximum level of military support that the Dominions could provide. As the war progressed, however, the relationship reversed. Dominion governments accepted increasing British liabilities in exchange for material resources. The UK's deteriorating financial position led to significant acts of Dominion largesse, from Canada's well acknowledged 'billion-dollar gift', \$700m interest-free loan and subsequent generous package of Mutual Aid, to South Africa's willingness to sell its locally-produced gold to the British Treasury. Indeed it was soon Dominion financial measures which helped to support the British war effort, facilitating the UK in making the maximum use of its own resources.

These methods of financial aid from the Dominion governments, however, were by no means inspired solely by the UK's plight or immune from domestic criticism. Local politics and national economic considerations weighed heavily on decisions regarding the form and extent of the assistance provided. More significantly, the external actions of – and in some instances pressure from – the USA influenced the nature of the Dominions' financial contribution.

Wartime finance ultimately placed few restrictions on the British conduct of war. This very success of British financial policy and the preponderance of American Lend-Lease aid in part explain the lack of attention that Anglo-Dominion economic relations have received. Yet Dominion assistance was provided on a significant scale and formed an essential element in the UK's financial strategy. As with other areas of the imperial war effort, from air training to the protection of merchant shipping, the contribution of the Dominions was of fundamental importance to the British conduct of war.

Gagan Preet Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Paper title: The Second World War and Food Rationing in India: Collieries, Cantonments, and Jails, 1939-46

Abstract: This paper seeks to understand the impact of the Second World War on food supplies of prisoners, miners, and combatants i.e. soldiers stationed in India. The paper is a comparative study of colonial state's policies of food rationing for combatants and non-combatants. In the conventional historiography of the war, the actual conflict – battles, strategy, and logistics – have received maximum attention. Its impact on society, experiences of common masses, and larger social consequences have been ignored. In recent works, historians have studied the impact of the war on society but these works have mostly focused on western societies. The literature on the impact of the war on non-western societies is far less. An effort is seldom made to understand the impact of war on colonial societies which were not active theatres of the Second World War. In such societies, the masses experienced the war through shortage of necessary goods, rationing of food items, black marketing, and inflation. The paper seeks to fulfil this gap in our understanding of the Second World War by studying its impact on society in colonial India. An emphasis of this paper is on socially and economically marginal groups i.e. miners and prisoners. However these marginal groups were not of marginal importance in the war efforts. The conventional accounts have ignored the contribution of non-combatants in the Second World War. During the Second World War, the coal production by miners was important for successful War operations. The paper further seeks to understand the experiences of prisoners, miners, and soldiers of the Second World War.

Panel 6: The Imperial Periphery

Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge.

Paper title: World War Two and the Metamorphosis of India's North-East Frontier

Abstract: For most of the colonial period, Assam and India's north-east frontier had been a forgotten corner of the British empire – a backwater whose military and geopolitical importance paled in comparison with that of the North-West Frontier of the British Raj. All this changed after the domino-like fall of colonial Asia in early 1942. With the British debacle in Burma and the loss of the last land route to besieged China, India's hitherto neglected north-eastern borderlands became the main frontline and springboard in the China-India-Burma theatre of World War Two.

This paper argues that the Second World War had a massive but paradoxical impact on colonial Assam and its hitherto thinly administered surrounding areas. By turning colonial Assam into a strategic hotspot, it caused an unprecedented penetration of the

Indian state in the area, and in the process turned the political economy of tribal societies upside down. Yet at the same time, the conflict largely reversed earlier colonial attempts to disentangle north-eastern India from its Sino-Tibetan and Southeast Asian hinterland, and even revived these trans-regional ties. Cognitive and strategic changes linked to World War Two also had major consequences on the manner of the transfer of power in north-east India two years later. The conflict changed both the way tribal populations engaged with the world and with the state, and the way colonial authorities saw them. Added to a new fear of foreign influence over the region, this laid the bases of a new frontier policy based on developmentalism, as well as interrogations regarding the future of Assam's hill regions in India.

These push-and-pull effects were central to the reconfiguration of Asian borderlands into discrete, often conflict-prone post-colonial entities. In stressing the importance of the Second World War for post-colonial South Asia, this paper therefore presents an alternative to dominant chronologies of the region – those centred around 1947.

Bridget Deane, University of the West of England

Paper title: “Lady Visitors”: Evacuees from Hong Kong in Australia during World War II

Abstract: In the second half of 1940 Australia welcomed approximately 3,500 British women and children who had been evacuated from Hong Kong as precautionary measure against continuing Japanese aggression on the Chinese mainland, particularly around the Crown Colony. My paper explains the co-operation between the British, Australian and Hong Kong governments in making arrangements for the reception and subsequent care of these evacuees while resident in the Dominion, and also comparison of how Australian states prepared for, and assisted their visitors (including interstate rivalry!). Additionally, I discuss the impact of racial discrimination, both in Hong Kong and Australia, which negatively influenced selection of evacuees, as well as the Australian response towards Asian or Eurasian women who made it through to Australia.

My paper also places the evacuation of women and children from Hong Kong within the context of other groups of evacuees from British and European colonies in South East Asia who sought refuge in Australia following the outbreak of war with Japan in December 1941. While the Hong Kong evacuees arrived in what could be described as peacetime (at least in the Pacific area), and after the C.O.R.B evacuation scheme sending children out from Britain to the Dominions had been abandoned, these later evacuees arrived in a fraught period as Australia mobilised for war on its own home front and faced the possibility of invasion. The country also had to organise the evacuation of its own civilians from Australian held territories such as New Guinea and New Britain, as well as areas in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The arrangements made for and assistance given to women and children from the Crown Colony, were in essence, a “dress rehearsal” and gave both the Commonwealth and state governments valuable experience in assisting those who arrived from December 1941 onwards.

Finally, the aim of my paper is to show another dimension to Australia’s history of World War II on the home front including its wider role in the Imperial war effort in taking in evacuees from British colonies and territories in the Far East. It will also highlight the importance of Australia as a dominion of the empire in relation to both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom and the bond between dominion, colony and mother country at a time of conflict. Based on a variety of archival sources, for example,

contemporary Australian newspapers and magazines, and state and commonwealth government records, I hope my paper will convey the enthusiastic Aussie response to the Hong Kong evacuees - a 'hand of welcome' to fellow Britishers in a time of need, and the close, if not always unproblematic, relationship between Australia and Great Britain.

Kazimuddin Ahmed

Paper title: Stalingrad of the East: An Ethnography of Memories

Abstract: "The war was like a knife with two edges. There was destruction, but there was also development. When there is war, it is necessary to rebuild." – 85 years old man in Imphal, India.

"If the war was not there, we would not have these memories of bombings, fleeing our village and the hard times. It was not our war. It was their war. We were upset about it." – 84 years old woman in Chizami, India.

These words are from people who witnessed the battles of Imphal and Kohima, in the northeast of what is now India, that were fought between British and Japanese armies during WWII. These are the same events that National Army Museum in the UK voted as "Britain's Greatest Battles." Both victor and vanquished tell tales of bravery, valour and sacrifice of those who fought the war, as do researchers exploring those decisive moments in history. However this theatre of war also had thousands of extras – the inhabitants of the areas where the battles were fought - who did not take sides, but were caught in a torrent of epic hostility. Using visual methods and oral testimonies, this project is an ethnography of memories and experiences of these witnesses whose narratives have not garnered much attention in the historiography of the war.